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Living with Windows 2000
Essex, David
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ABSTRACT: In a bid to improve availability, Pittsburgh-based business
exchange FreeMarkets Inc. last fall began moving its data center operations
to Windows 2000. The company consolidated SQL Server 7 databases on dual
clustered Windows 2000 Datacenter Server systems running SQL Server 2000
that power its QuickSource **auction** management application. John
Benzinger, FreeMarkets' vice president of IT, says he is happy with the
improved availability of the systems under Windows 2000 since migrating
from Windows NT and SQL Server 7. Manual inspection of individual
server-availability logs shows improved uptime, but Benzinger does not have
apples-to-apples metrics to compare the old and new systems, and he laments
the industry's lack of a single comprehensive tool for monitoring his
infrastructure.

TEXT: After initiating a major upgrade in its data center, FreeMarkets Inc.
says uptime has improved, but tight budgets have slowed plans for a
companywide migration.

By David Essex

Note: In a bid to improve availability, Pittsburgh-based business exchange
FreeMarkets Inc. last fall began moving its data center operations to
Windows 2000 [Technology, "Betting on Win 2k," Feb. 26].

The company consolidated SQL Server 7 databases on dual clustered Windows
2000 Datacenter Server systems running SQL Server 2000 that power its
QuickSource **auction** management application. FreeMarkets also migrated its
 Web   server   farm to Windows 2000 Advanced Server and planned to move
its other customer service applications, DirectSource and FullSource, and
its back-office applications to the new system. Nine months later,
Computerworld revisited FreeMarkets to check on the project's progress.

JOHN BENZINGER, FreeMarkets' vice president of IT, says he's happy with the
improved availability of the systems under Windows 2000 since migrating
from Windows NT and SQL Server 7.

"Our strategy that we laid out has played out exactly as we planned it," he
says, referring to his quest for 99.999% uptime and better scalability for
FreeMarkets' Web-based **auction** services. Benzinger says manual inspection

of individual server-availability logs shows improved uptime, but he doesn't have apples-to-apples metrics to compare the old and new systems, and he laments the industry's lack of a single comprehensive tool for monitoring his infrastructure.

FreeMarkets acts as a Web-based sourcing service for industrial parts and other commodities and allows its users to set up and manage online bidding for supply contracts. Its technology ranges from QuickSource, for simple do-it-yourself auctions, to more full-featured FullSource and DirectSource, powered by its BidWare engine.

FreeMarkets has added three Windows 2000 management tools since the initial deployment last fall. The company installed Microsoft Application Center 2000 and will use it to deploy Web applications across multiple servers directly from its quality assurance lab. Benzinger says he hopes that will cut down on the labor required to manually deploy applications on each server in a cluster. "It wasn't the easiest of implementations," he says, citing disappointing interoperability with FreeMarkets' existing load--balancing hardware and software.

The company also deployed its Active Directory infrastructure, which it runs in mixed mode, because many domain controllers companywide still run Windows NT 4. But the move to Active Directory helped reduce the total number of domain controllers, eliminating a point of vulnerability inherent in the NT architecture, Benzinger says. Active Directory also supports FreeMarkets' availability strategy by letting administrators quickly add domains and isolate them, as well as better manage access rights and other security issues, he says.

In April, Benzinger added Windows 2000 Terminal Services in Singapore and at operations centers in Brussels and Pittsburgh. Employees who lack desktop **resources** to run FreeMarkets' standard fat client can connect using the Windows thin-client software, and administrators use it to remotely administer the servers.

FreeMarkets also tried using Terminal Services to deploy BidWare upgrades to servers but dropped the idea. "It really wasn't working that well over dial-up," says Tony Bernard, director of technical architecture at FreeMarkets.

The economic downturn has curbed FreeMarkets' IT plans. Benzinger has pushed back some projects, including upgrades of the BidWare engine, which still runs in SQL Server 7 on NT servers and drives the DirectSource and FullSource customer applications.

Upgrades of FreeMarkets' enterprise resource planning package from J.D. Edwards & Co. in Denver and customer service software from Siebel Systems Inc. in San Mateo, Calif., have also been put on the back burner. "It's a matter of getting those certified for Windows 2000 as well as having the time to do regression testing to not put our environment at risk" says Bernard.
Benzinger says the upgrades will further improve availability and could be justified as cost-saving, productivity-enhancing expenditures. "But," he says, "there is the investment required to get to the cost-- savings position."

Though the company's NT setup wasn't built for high availability, Benzinger says availability targets have been met by following vendors' recommended best practices, including preventive disk maintenance and periodic rebooting of NT servers.

Into early this year, much of the Windows 2000 migration involved moving and consolidating SQL Server 7 databases onto new servers running SQL Server 2000. FreeMarkets consolidated file and print servers that had seen "constant growth" under Windows 2000, says Brenda Basista, a Compaq Computer Corp. consultant who was brought in to run the database migration. In Pittsburgh alone, "we got rid of five file servers," says Benzinger.

A major test came in early February, when FreeMarkets started offering a beta of QuickSource. Benzinger says the launch, two weeks ahead of schedule, went smoothly.

He's still evaluating what it would take to move everything to Windows 2000 but says, "I don't have an end date in mind." Save for QuickSource upgrades, no new product introductions are planned for this year.

Looking back at an intense year deploying Windows 2000, Benzinger says that besides improving availability, the operating system has proved to be easier to manage and more feature-rich, stable and flexible than NT 4. "I think our biggest challenge has been getting the ability to test some of the applications," he says. "This goes back to the business case: Would we rather spend our time testing apps or developing new functionality? Eventually, features and requirements of the apps themselves will dictate the migration."

WINDOWS 2000 is easier to manage and more feature-- rich than NT 4 says John Benzinger, vice president of IT at FreeMarkets.

Essex is a freelance writer in Antrim, N.H.

Ref #	Hits	Search Query	DBs	Default Operator	Plurals	Time Stamp
L1	2954	auction and format	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 09:51
L2	2500	(allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 09:52
L3	1615	"load balancing" and bandwidth and dedicated and server	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 09:54
L4	118	"webserver farm" or "web server farm"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:00
L5	41054	"webserver" or "web server"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:09
L6	12060	"webserver" or "web server"	EPO; JPO; DERWENT	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:01
L7	3	"webserver farm" or "web server farm"	EPO; JPO; DERWENT	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:00
L8	216	"webserver" or "web server" and auction	EPO; JPO; DERWENT	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:07
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L19	1662	709/226.ccls.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:11
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L27	4605	707/10.ccls.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/05/05 10:12
S1	5054	allocat$ and resource and pric$	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:10

S2	28275	service WITH level	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:10
S4	236	((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and auction	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:11
S5	124	(((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)) and (asp or "server farm")	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:13
S6	331	((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:53
S7	468	((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and billing and pricing	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 17:53
S8	191	(((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)) and billing and pricing	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:26
S9	175	((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)) and billing and pricing) and negotiat$	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:31
S10	14	(((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)) and billing and pricing) and (negotiat$ WITH agent$)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:34
S11	27	(((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level)) and (auction or bid)) and billing and pricing) and (negotiat$ SAME agent$)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:36
S12	57	auction and bid and resource and (negotiat$ WITH agent$)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:40

S13	616	(negotiat$ WITH agent$)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:44
S14	68	(((negotiat$ WITH agent$)) and auction) and resourc$	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:40
S15	86	((negotiat$ WITH agent$)) and auction	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 18:41
S16	102	(negotiat$ WITH agent$) and bid and resources	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 19:09
S17	28	"current price" and "new price" and dedicated	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2003/09/16 19:09
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S20	236	((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level) and redistribut$) and (customer or user or consumer)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2004/08/23 15:47
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S23	0	((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level) and redistribut$) and (customer or user or consumer)) and (customer or user or consumer) with resource) and redistibution	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2004/08/23 15:49
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S25	3	((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level) and redistribut$) and (customer or user or consumer)) and (customer or user or consumer) with resource) and (redistribution WITH resources) SAME (customer or user or consumer)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2004/08/23 15:50
S26	8	((((allocat$ and resource and pric$) and (service WITH level) and redistribut$) and (customer or user or consumer)) and (customer or user or consumer) with resource) and (redistribution WITH resources)	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2004/08/23 15:50
S27	1926	"load balancing" and bandwidth and dedicated	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 15:43
S28	1534	"load balancing" and bandwidth and dedicated and server	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 15:44
S29	58	S28 and auction	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 16:08
S31	517	auction SAME format	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 16:08
S32	381	auction WITH format	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 16:09

S33	270	S32 and server	US-PGPUB; USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	OR	ON	2005/03/14 16:09
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